



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

SOME GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN THE ADJUSTMENT OF THE RELATIONS BETWEEN EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE.

By H. H. VREELAND,
President New York City Railway Company.

In no respect has the great advance of modern industry been more disorganizing—if I may use that word for want of a better one—than in the relationship of employer and employee.

In the earlier stages of industrial life, when great artisans gathered about them journeymen and apprentices, the numbers were so limited and the conditions of life so restricted that there was established, of necessity, a relationship almost of guardian and ward. Master and man not infrequently lived together, had identical tastes, shared the same social, artistic and commercial ambitions, and were inspired with a common civic pride, vivified by the comparatively amiable rivalry involving other cities and towns whose people were engaged in work of the same class. This patriarchal relationship, of course, has its limitations, and would be quite impractical in the vast hives of industry made necessary by modern conditions. To linger in regret over its departure would, to practical minds, be a waste of sentiment much like bewailing those good old stage-coach and canal-boat days now happily forever gone.

I have no sentimental protest to make about the altered conditions which now make it possible for twenty men, in a day, with the aid of machinery, to do as much as one thousand could have formerly done with their hands in six months; but in the change there has come about an alteration in the relationship of employer and employee that I, in common with every right-minded citizen, must recognize as not for the best interests of the State at large, and assuredly not for the best interests of those immediately involved and affected by it. One of the most conspicuous results of the sudden and still active expansion of the personnel of great industries has been the annihilation of individuals, the utter submergence of single human units. This inundation in some places is so great as to be utterly destructive of all possible individual development. In some of the industries the numbers are so great that the ultimate

managers, for mere clerical convenience, are compelled to consider their employees in classes, some of these classes or units comprising as many as 10,000 men; and so, as business grows, the distance between employers and employed seems to widen daily. This separation has, as was inevitable, given rise to a lack of sympathy between the two extremes of all great industrial concerns that needs the attention of thoughtful men.

It has, in the past twenty-five years, expressed itself in many wasteful efforts at readjustment. Workingmen do not understand the besetments of the employers, and it is equally true that, amid the anxieties of competition and preoccupations which far-reaching enterprises entail on them, the employers are not fully awake to the condition of those they employ.

As I see the situation (and I have been familiar with it for a great many years), there seems to be very little possibility of bringing about the re-establishment of anything approximating even the condition described above. This conviction long ago turned my attention to a close study of the situation, in order to ascertain if some substitute for the old lost relationship might not be found.

In searching for the small human beginnings of a number of classical industrial disagreements, I was surprised to find that it was not so much a lack of sympathy between the capitalists or executive directors of these great concerns and their men that caused the trouble, as an utter lack of sympathy or executive ability among petty subordinates, men clothed with brief authority, who failed to exercise it beneficently and intelligently. In my search I took in the history of several great enterprises that seemed to have escaped the troubles that beset others, and there I found further corroboration of the truth that intelligence and humanity were potential, and that the reason these concerns had not had trouble was because of the intelligence, sympathy and firmness of the subordinate heads in charge of the various groups and classes of men.

From my own experience, with a very miscellaneous lot of men numbering about 15,000 in the city of New York, men gathered from all quarters of the country and of all nationalities, I have had abundant proof that firmness, tempered with the intelligent sympathy for their necessities, works wonders.

And so, if I had to speak a word of advice concerning the most
(508)

important principle in the proper adjustment of the relations between employer and employee, it would be, "Have a care in the selection of your subordinate heads." Only a man who knows the conditions and point of view of those he commands has the capacity to control or influence workingmen for their own good. If he has knowledge and experience that is common to them, if he knows the kind of lives they lead, the anxieties that pursue them, the ambitions they have for themselves and their families, he is surely the man indicated for advancement and control, it being always understood that he has executive capacity. To take a man who has executive capacity and has administered it in one field, or among a certain class, and place him in charge of a group of men with whom he has not the kind of sympathy I have described, and expect him to control them intelligently, is out of the question, in my opinion. Such a man may take his orders from his superior and execute them with military precision, and yet fail to get what would be naturally expected out of his men. Nor will such a man keep his subordinates contented, and this element, to my mind, is of quite as much importance as a wage scale.

There has grown up, also, my investigation shows me, a custom that from the human point of view is very cruel, but which from the economic point of view is absolutely essential. It is the custom of estimating the potential of men in mass as you would an engine, and by hard and fast rules expressing from the mass a given number of units of product. When this custom is put into operation, and there is lacking the sympathy and knowledge of conditions of which I have spoken, the result is at once brutalizing and disappointing. It is bound to break down of its own rigidity, and in my experience in the long run it is not economical. On the contrary, I think experience shows it to be wasteful. In the great aggregation of men and capital, which go to make up our modern industrial units, it may have been inevitable that in concerns suddenly brought into life, new and strange foremen or department heads were necessary; and I suppose that much that is justly complained of by workingmen and those who investigate their status will gradually disappear as there is enlightened recognition of the profitableness of blending into the relationship of employer and employee the intelligent understanding essential to the peaceful and profitable prosecution of any kind of work in which great masses of men are engaged.